Kennedy Probe Death Reported as Not Suicide

New Orleans Pathologist Discloses Findings After Performing Ferrie Autopsy

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NEW ORLEANS—The pathologist who performed an autopsy on David William Ferrie, a key figure in the local investigation of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, said Thursday Ferrie "definitely did not commit suicide."

The comment from Ronald A. Welsh, a Louisiana State University professor, came amid much confusion swirling around Ferrie's death Wednesday.

Orleans Parish (County) Coroner Nicholas Chetta revealed that Ferrie's body lay unclaimed in the city-parish morgue and would be buried in potter's field within 30 days unless his friends or relatives come forth to claim the body.

Dr. Chetta said the official cause of Ferrie's death still remains unclassified, and would stay that way until toxicology reports are completed in about a week.

No Marks of Violence

However, he did say there were no marks of violence on Ferrie's body. And he reiterated that the immediate cause of Ferrie's death was a cerebral hemorrhage. This contrasted with a statement Wednesday by Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison that Ferrie had committed suicide. Garrison later hedged, telling newsmen they should check with the coroner.

Meanwhile, the FBI continued its policy of refusing to comment on the Garrison investigation, but it was learned the FBI had eliminated Ferrie as a suspect early in its probe of the assassination.

The FBI accumulated evidence which it considered showed conclusively that Ferrie and President Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, were not acquainted and that Ferrie was in New Orleans on the afternoon of Nov. 2, 1963, the day of the assassination in Dallas.

Garrison, who launched the controversial investigation three months ago, issued a three and one-half page statement Thursday afternoon lashing out at "self-appointed experts" who he said think that everything his office had developed in the probe "should be tied up into neat packages and shipped at once to the federal government."

Reaction by Garrison

During news conferences Monday and Wednesday Garrison reacted strongly to any suggestions that he turn his investigation over to the FBI or seek federal aid.

He said in the statement Thursday: "Just in case I have not made myself clear, let me say that under no circumstances will I turn over any evidence which we have gathered to any other agency."

Garrison concluded the statement, as he had Monday and Wednesday, by saying that he would have no further comments on his investigation because of the adverse effect of publicity on any future steps he might take.

Garrison Wednesday had described Ferrie as "one of history's most important individuals," and that he was involved "in events

Please Turn to Page 6, Col. 1

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Continued from First Page

culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy." He also said he had planned to arrest Ferrie next week.

Ferrie's body was discovered Wednesday at 11:40 a.m. in his second-floor walkup apartment. Dr. Chetta said the 48-year-old man could have died anytime between late Tuesday night and 5 a.m. Wednesday.

Last Visitor

Apparently, George Lardner Jr., a Washington Post reporter who interviewed Ferrie from midnight to 4 a.m., was the last person to see him alive.

The whereabouts and significance of the unidentified man who reportedly notified officials of Ferrie's death still remains obscure.

Garrison's office refused to comment. The homicide bureau and office of the chief of police referred all questions about the man to the coroner's office. Dr. Chetta said, as far as he knew, the man had wandered by Ferrie's apartment and when he found the door locked became suspicious and notified the district attorney's office.

Dr. Chetta revealed that part of the note found on the dining table in Ferrie's cluttered apartment would remain classified until the official cause of death is made public. He said the note was typed by Ferrie but was unsigned and undated, "and as far as I am concerned could have been written last week."

He said the district attorney's office had asked that most of the note remain classified. He said the part of the note still kept secret was "philosophical in nature," but declined to elaborate further.

Dr. Chetta Wednesday revealed only the first paragraph of the note which said "To leave this life is, for me, a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable and on the other hand, everything that is loathsome."

Dr. Chetta, under questioning in a news conference, theorized that the only possible link between Ferrie's death and suicide could come through the use of pills which induced such violent retching that they might have resulted in bursting a blood vessel in the base of Ferrie's skull—the cause of the cerebral hemorrhage.

However, he emphasized that this was only a theory.

Asked if Ferrie could have been killed, for example, by a karate blow in the back of the neck, Chetta replied that there was no sign of any tissue damage and nothing to show that such a blow might have been administered.

Under Strain

Welsh, a professor of pathology at LSU's school of medicine, said his autopsy showed that Ferrie had a history of high blood pressure. He said the high blood pressure was above a "moderate to moderately severe degree."

Welsh indicated that Ferrie apparently was under a strain which he described as a "keg of dynamite" in view of his medical history, and said his autopsy indicated Ferrie had had a previous hemorrhage, but may not even have realized it.

He pointed out that severe anxiety and stress would cause the blood pressure to rise precipitously.

However, Welsh emphasized that it was up to the coroner to classify the death and that this would not be completed until the final toxicological investigation.

He said it was extremely remote that Ferrie attempted to commit suicide with an overdose of pills.

In the interview with Lardner, Ferrie said he considered "this preoccupation" with the assassination "ghoulish." But Lardner observed that Ferrie's rooms showed it occupied him day and night, Lardner reported.

Copies of magazine articles on the President's death, books attacking the Warren Commission, even his own mathematical calculations of the path of the assassin's bullets, cluttered the floor.

On Tuesday, Ferrie said,

LAUGH IT OFF

"I'd like a job where I can grow with the firm."

he had been at the public library reading the Warren report.

Ferrie explained his own investigation by telling Lardner, "I'm just curious." He said he did not trust the courts or Garrison's investigation.

Ferrie also said he and several acquaintances went to Texas after the assassination—but not to Dallas. He said they went to the Galveston - Houston area to hunt geese.

Ferrie was a native of Cleveland. He moved to New Orleans in the early 1950s, after spending a short time in Miami.

Varied Career

At one time, he attended a seminary for priests in Carthagena, Ohio, but dropped out before his ordination. He taught aeronautics at Benedictine Catholic High School in Cleveland from 1944 to 1948.

Ferrie had been a commercial airline pilot, Garrison said, and at the time of his death he listed himself in the telephone directory as a psychiatrist and worked part-time as a private investigator as well as giving flying lessons at the New Orleans airport.

Ferrie was arrested in Jefferson Parish in 1961 on a morals charge involving a 16-year-old boy, but the charge was not pressed.

Lardner reported that Ferrie told him he was fluent in several languages and trained in psychology and medicine.

Dr. Chetta said he found "priestly vestments" in Ferrie's apartment.

Another person on the periphery of the case, David Lewis, 26, a bus station baggage handler, dropped out of sight Wednesday night but showed up in Garrison's office Thursday. He had said he had feared for the safety of his family because of his knowledge of a possible conspiracy to kill Mr. Kennedy.

Another figure in the case, Miguel Torres, was removed at his own request from a jail cell to the hospital at Orleans Parish prison.

WDSU-TV said it had been informed by "a source" that a relative of Torres claimed to have received a telephone call threatening the man's life.

Criminal Sheriff Louis Heyd Jr. had no comment other than to say Torres wasn't sick.

Torres, a Cuban exile, was returned to New Orleans from the Louisiana State Prison at Angola in January and has been questioned by Garrison's investigators. Torres lived a block away from Oswald's 1963 residence here.